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ABSTRACT

Designed to fill North Dakota's growing need for qualified special education personnel, the pamphlet briefly addresses the following topics: the responsibility of individuals and organizations in recruiting personnel, candidates for recruitment, content of the interview, strategies for promoting the job, recruiting in rural areas, recruiting in other states, and long-range planning for recruitment. Although the pamphlet was designed for North Dakota administrators, the suggestions in the pamphlet can be used in any state. (LH)

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RECRUITMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PERSONNEL

EC 165 159

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Recruitment of special education personnel is an ongoing concern. It does not begin the day a position vacancy is announced. It is an ever present responsibility of all individuals, groups, and organizations concerned with handicapped students.

COMMUNITY

Any individual or organized group in the community can play a part in attracting personnel to special education programs and in maintaining currently employed staff. Parents, the media, church and civic groups must be informed of existing programs and personnel needs so that recruitment efforts will be timely and appropriate.

TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

Teacher training personnel in special education are in an excellent position to identify candidates with appropriate attributes, to advise college students in career choices, and to personalize classes so that necessary competencies are attained. A college role is to serve the consumer. A close working relationship between college training programs and potential employers in local special education units is essential to assure a match between job and training.

STATE LEVEL PARTICIPATION

The Department of Public Instruction maintains a statewide picture of personnel needs. Department publications must keep before the educational community the status of special education personnel needs.

State level voluntary organizations such as the North Dakota Council for Exceptional Children also have a role in recruitment. It is a challenge for personnel presently employed in the field to act as a catalyst in attracting high school students, college students, and persons employed in other fields to consider a career in special education.

THE EMPLOYER SEEKING PERSONNEL

Finally, the most active agent in recruitment is the administrator. The person who is ultimately responsible to fill the position when a vacancy arises must be prepared to find the right candidate and to sell the job. You are responsible, but you are not alone. This booklet is intended to remind others to share that responsibility and to help you do the job successfully.

WHO SHOULD BE RECRUITED?

Some of the best candidates for a career in special education are regular classroom teachers. This is not to say that every classroom teacher who inquires about a career in special education should be encouraged. Frequently teachers will seek a job in working with the handicapped because they feel it will be easier working with smaller groups of children. Others want to work with the gifted believing that both planning and instruction are easier with only the advanced student to think about. These impressions are not accurate. It requires specialized skill and persistent hard work to identify and meet the unique needs of exceptional students.

The experienced teacher's perspective in development and learning is invaluable in a special education career. For this reason a good way to begin recruitment is to identify experienced classroom teachers who are open to the idea of further study to prepare for a specialized area of education. Personnel working with children in other situations may also be excellent candidates.

The type of person who will do well in special education will meet the following characteristics:

1. Personnel who find ways to work around very difficult situations and who freely alter procedures in order to accommodate students with special abilities.

2. Personnel who intellectually aspire toward learning and professional growth. Being intellectually able will in itself not produce a successful specialist. It is a necessary ingredient, however, in order to understand the theory and practice of evauating students, communicating the findings to other persons and implementing appropriate programs.

3. Personnel who exercise good interpersonal skills. Sometimes a quiet, unassuming characteristic is mistaken for a passive attitude. Such candidates may also have excellent potential and must be observed in situations where attitudes and working relationships with other professional persons can be evaluated.

Recruiting trainees from within the community has been a productive plan for rural areas of North Dakota.

Federal monies are available to a limited extent to provide traineeships but school districts will find that appropriating local monies to be used for training purposes will often be the most beneficial plan. Teachers from within the community may be selected to return to school for specialized training with the stipulation that they must return to the school district for a given number of employment years (for example, two years).

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW AND SELLING THE JOB

An interview team is suggested to consist of the administrator who will make the final employment decisions, a person who will most directly supervise the candidate to be employed, and someone who will work as a fellow employee.

PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

Criteria should be established in advance so that the team can objectively determine if the applicant is the right person for the job. The agreed upon criteria must be kept in mind as the candidate's training and experience are reviewed, and while conducting the interview. The interview should include a two-way conversation. It should result in the candidate knowing whether this is the type of job he or she is seeking and it should help the interview team determine whether they have found a satisfactory candidate.

CONTENT

The interview should provide an opportunity to discuss the candidate's interests, experiences, skills, and philosophy related to the following areas.

1. Techniques in working with children and delivery service models. Keep in mind the specific duties of the position being considered but do not limit the discussion to those elements. Ways of working with children remain central in special education and regardless of the positions in questions, getting at the candidate's preferences in this area will tell the employer a great deal.

2. Working with parents. It is best for the employer to avoid a preestablished conclusion in such topics. Open ended topics will not only encourage the candidate to express ideas openly, but it will also give the employer an opportunity to learn of new methods and ideas.

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3. Working with other personnel. Learn as much as possible about the candidate's experiences in working with other personnnel. Evaluation of students, implementing individual programs, total program planning and other professional tasks all require team effort. If the position in question is one in which consultation will be expected, set the stage for the applicant to convey how he or she would go about a given consultation task. Example: how does the candidate generally react when a teacher or other professional person fails to follow through with recommended procedures?

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Establish whether the candidate has had the required training for the position. If the candidate is one that you know will be considered for employment, provide the necessary information so that application can be made for state certification and credentialing. Avoid requesting credential approval by telephone since it cannot be a conclusive approval until formal application is made.

If you have serious doubts about the candidate, be prepared to explain the reasons in a frank but polite and professional manner. If the position in question is one for which you desire a more experienced candidate, state your impressions honestly but be positive about your interest in the candidate if you need additional time to make a decision after other applicants have been interviewed.

SELLING THE JOB

It is difficult to sell a job if the discussion centers only around the specific duties of the position being considered. Challenge will be added to an ambitious professional person if the responsibilities assigned can be seen as contributing to the total educational effort. If the prospective employee recognizes that expectations are in keeping with his or her professional aspirations and life style, the position will appear much more favorable.

Be prepared to sell the job during the interview. It is too late to do so if the candidate informs you later that he or she has accepted another position.

Conducting The Interview And Selling The Job

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INCENTIVES FOR RURAL EMPLOYMENT

It is always a challenge to recruit personnel to work in rural areas. Frequent frustration is experienced in attempting to employ personnel who wish to work in a rural area and again to maintain their positions more than a minimum number of years. Opportunities in larger cities hold appeal with which employers in rural areas feel they cannot compete.

Consideration must be given to providing incentives which will offset the less appealing characteristics of employment in rural special education programs.

A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Professional isolation is the reason given most frequently for personnel leaving a rural special education position. Often this characteristic of the position is not anticipated by a new employee until he or she is on the job and finds there are few opportunities for the much needed support from contact with persons in similar positions or with more experienced personnel. If there are few specialized resources locally upon which special education personnel can depend for support, it is important to make specific allowances for this need. The school district or special education unit can arrange for professional opportunities which will make a personal support system possible.

1. Meeting regularly with professional peers.

2. Opportunities to visit other programs.

3. Provide for regular consultation. Consultation for new personnel should be frequent.

4. Organize a special education coordinating committee made up of an equal number of regular education personnel and special education personnel.

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

If the distance from college and university centers is great, professional persons cannot take advantage of the stimulation provided by an academic community. Opportunities for professional growth must be made accessible for persons in rural programs.

1. Inservice opportunities.
2. Monetary incentives for attending summer workshops or on-campus professional classes during the summer.
3. Providing local funds to bring extension courses into the community.
4. Establishing a schedule for attendance at national or regional professional meetings.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

Personnel in rural areas frequently leave after the first year because they see little or no opportunity for advancement. There are two major objectives in looking for advancement: to seek further professional challenges and to anticipate substantial salary increase. To maintain personnel with leadership potential for an extended period of time, other opportunities for professional satisfaction should be provided. Consideration should also be given to accelerate salary increases beyond the first year or two of service.

1. Additional salary benefits, especially following the first year of service.
2. Encourage personnel with special leadership skills to share skills and ideas through professional organizations and use of the media.
3. Be open to the professional person's ideas in working creatively with special groups such as parents, peer tutoring programs, volunteers, and so forth.

Continued...

Incentives For Rural Employment

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EFFECTIVE USE OF ITINERANT PERSONNEL

Itinerant personnel complain that they tire of time spent in travel when their duties take them to two, three, or more sites. They tend to feel that time on the road is not time well spent and therefore travel becomes a nuisance factor.

Administrators can work toward building the kind of image which adds to the satisfaction of the rural worker. Creative attention should be given toward making the best use of professional time for itinerant personnel. The typical kind of lock step scheduling is often inappropriate and calls for more travel miles than are appropriate.

1. More effective use of the telephone for follow-up work.

2. Transdisciplinary services. Making better use of the evaluation and program team meetings or IEP meetings to plan shared responsibility. Persons in one discipline to instruct another professional person in techniques required to work with a child.

3. An active volunteer program and a more effective paraprofessional program with inservice training in techniques and background information as well as ongoing inservice training in specific tasks as they relate to a given child.

4. Avoid predetermined scheduling which does not allow for individualizing according to the severity of a student's needs.

SOCIAL SATISFACTION IN RURAL LIVING

Selling a job means selling the community. Distance from cultural and other large city happenings and a lack of variety in social opportunities are a cause for unrest in some rural areas. Selected persons in the community will be willing to assist in trying to match the social and personal interests of new employees with opportunities for cultural and social events in the community.

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1. A citizen's committee to bring personnel in touch with groups, events, and opportunities which match their life styles. Include parents, school board members, church representatives, and other community leaders.

2. Draw up a list of seasonal events or regularly sponsored activities. Include social and professional opportunities from the larger community of neighboring towns.

Incentives For Rural Employment (Contd.)

WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING

You may wish to contact persons involved in recruitment efforts.

1. Dr. Don Boehmer, Lake Region Special Education Director, Devils Lake, North Dakota, was one of the project directors in a recent project SERVING RURAL SLD CHILDREN. Thirteen SLD teachers were trained and are presently employed in North Dakota. Experienced classroom teachers were identified in the Lake Region area and received their coursework by traveling to the University of North Dakota for classes during part of the time and having professors from the University provide some coursework in the Lake Region area.

2. Dr. Mary Lindquist is the project director of the FIELD BASED SECONDARY SLD PROJECT which is in its third year of training SLD teachers. University of North Dakota professors taught clases one day each week in a designated central point. Ten to twelve teachers who were employed four days per week attended class on the fifth day continuing on a weekly basis for the entire school year. Candidates also attended one summer session in order to complete the requirements for the SLD credential.

3. Dr. John Kincheloe, chairman of the special education division of Minot State College has frequently arranged for extension courses which provided introductory and other classes in special education. Primary coursework to complete the training program must be taken on campus.

4. The NATIONAL RURAL RESEARCH AND PERSONNEL PREPARATION PROJECT provides a personnel data bank linking persons seeking jobs with positions available in rural areas. Direct correspondence to Sandy Watkins, Wells Hall, Room 117, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky, 42071.

5. A school district in Arizona made relocation easier for personnel by providing the name and address of a specific individual who assisted with some of the relocation detail. Arrangements were also made for new personnel to stay in local homes until they could find housing. More information for the procedures used can be obtained by writing to the Mary C. O'Brien School and Pinal County Special Education, 11 Mile Corner Station, Box 125, Casa Grande, Arizona 85222 (602-723-5371).

6. For information from school districts which have provided local scholarship monies, contact Gail Bess at the Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California, 90406.

7. Tom Cummings, Director of Special Education in the Pembina Special Education Unit, Cavalier, North Dakota, directed an event in March 1982 which brought local directors of special education in touch with North Dakota colleges and universities providing training programs in special education. Meetings with college professors and students in training enabled the special education directors to discuss opportunities, special education issues and trends in programming.

   Other preservice work with universities planned and implemented by local school administrators are reported by:

   Allan Zetler, Western Montana College, Dillon, Montana 59725 (406-683-7325)

   Clint Powell, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 37916; Ivan Muse, Secondary Education and Fourdations, 110 McKay Building, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

8. The North Dakota Teacher Center project with support from the Department of Public Instruction established a teacher exchange program which provided inservice for regular classroom teachers to use teaching strategies and curriculum design as developed by teachers of gifted students. The project served as an incentive for interested teachers to explore a special education career in teaching gifted and talented students.

9. A project in Idaho trained graduating teacher educators to act as replacements for one semester while experienced regular classroom teachers were brought to campus for special education training. This procedure was reported in the Journal of School Psychology, Volume 10, Issue 2, 1972.

10. A school district contracted with a university and paid the tuition for classroom teachers to enroll in courses leading toward a credential in specific learning disabilities. Reported by Hyrum Henderson, Department of Special Education, UMC 65, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322.

11. The Second Mile Plan was reported by the Houston Independence school district in which bonuses were earned by teachers. Stipends were offered for teachers who were willing to work in areas where there was a critical staff shortage or where varied assignments were made such as extended day service.

What Others Are Doing

LONG RANGE PLANNING FOR RECRUITMENT

Quality programs in special education are dependent on a qualified and competent staff. The time to be concerned about the availability of adequate staff is long before the day that a position vacancy occurs.

Several things must happen simultaneously for a program to develop at the time and place where it is needed, and all of these elements require long-range planning.

Citizens must be informed so that general support can develop and grow. Legislators, tax payers, and school board members must be informed so that necessary funds can be appropriated. Teacher training institutions must continue to keep pace with developing programs. Present and future candidates for employment must see that a career in special education is for them.

A total community effort is required, and collectively all communties make up the necessary statewide effort. Every opportunity should be used to promote activities toward the desired end. Examples of these efforts are:

1. Visibility of current programs in the community will make young persons and adults aware of the advantages to handicapped youth which a good program will provide. Opportunities for service holds much appeal to sensitive persons.

2. Organize a local unit of a Council for Exceptional Children associated with the North Dakota CEC federation. The administrator's participation in this organization will direct activities toward recruitment efforts.

3. Identify groups seeking ways to promote community projects. Local service clubs may provide funds to train personnel who will return a service to the community. Since some localities do not have service clubs because of the small number of residents, resources in the larger community of the surrounding area must be sought.

4. A recruitment budget is a good investment for a school district. Using funds for recruitment may be many faceted but primarily loans or traineeships for promising young people or for professional persons from other fields who are interested in a career in special education will provide the most desirable direct incentive. Obligations for loan repayment may be decreased with each year of service provided in the community from which the loan is received.

5. Provide information and experiences to high school youths so that promising candidates will become aware of careers in special education. Special attention should be given to high school seniors, career day activities, and vocational guidance counselors who need to have access to recruitment materials.

6. Be in touch with education departments in the teacher training institutions in your area. Contacting professors personally will be most beneficial. Ask not only for names of competent trained special education personnel but also recent graduates who may be recruited to return to school for specialized training.

AGENCIES TO CONTACT

North Dakota Teacher Placement Service
501 First Street Northwest
Mandan, North Dakota 58554

North Dakota Colleges Preparing Teachers
In Special Education
The Special Education Chairman of:
Minot State College, Minot
University Of North Dakota, Grand Forks

Colleges in neighboring states and other states known to have special education training programs.

Submit position descriptions to professional journals in the area in which candidates are sought.

Long Range Planning For Recruitment

Additional copies may be obtained by writing to:

Department of Public Instruction
Division of Special Education
State Capitol
Bismark, North Dakota 58505-0164

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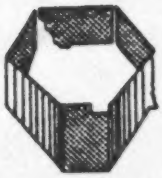

Intermountain Plains
Regional Resource Center

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Exceptional Child Center
UMC 68
Utah State University
Logan, Utah 84322